Amendments

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently amended) A method for instant messaging on a recipient's computer system, including:

on the recipient's computer system, receiving an instant message (IM) containing content from a sender, said IM addressed to the recipient by the sender;

on the recipient's computer system, determining an identification of said sender of said IM from said IM;

on the recipient's computer system, determining if an animated character associated with said sender is stored on the recipient's computer system and if not,

sending a request from the recipient's computer system for an animated character associated with said sender to a character server with said identification of said sender, said character server having records of animated characters and senders, each sender associated with a specific animated character;

receiving, in response to said request, in the recipient's computer system from said character server the animated character associated with said sender;

displaying said animated character associated with said sender at a location on the recipient's computer system, the location selected by the recipient or the recipient's computer system; and

delivering said content on the recipient's computer system through said animated character;

wherein said IM is received at said recipient's computer system without being relayed by said character server, and

wherein said instant message when sent by the sender does not include said animated character associated with said sender and when received by the recipient and was addressed to the recipient by the sender.

Claims 2-8 (Cancelled)

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Claim 9 (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 further including:

   periodically retrieving advertisement details from a server;

   downloading to the recipient's computer system an animated advertising character
   specified to represent said advertisement;

   displaying on the recipient's computer system said animated advertising character
   specified to represent said advertisement; and

   receiving content specified for said advertisement on the recipient's computer
   system through said animated advertising character.

Claim 10 (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further including: sending an alert
to a server;

   receiving in the recipient's computer system a response containing content from
   said server generated by an artificial intelligence (AI) application;

   displaying on the recipient's computer system an animated character associated
   with said AI application;

   and

   receiving said content on the recipient's computer system through said animated
   character associated with said AI application.

Claim 11 (Original) The method of claim 10, wherein said sending an alert includes:

   sending a message indicating that a web search is to be performed; and sending
   keywords to search in said web search.

Claim 12 (Previously presented) The method of claim 11, wherein said receiving said
content comprises receiving results of said web search.

Claim 13 (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further including:

   associating a sender with a plurality of predefined animated characters; and

   allowing the sender to select an animated character from the plurality of
   predefined animated characters associated with the sender to be displayed on the
   recipient's computer system in the event the sender sends an IM message to said
   recipient's computer system.

Claim 14 (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, further including:

   initially allowing the sender to upload an image for use in creating a record of an
   animated character to be displayed on the recipient's computer system when said
   sender sends an IM message to said recipient's computer system.

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Claim 15 (Currently amended) A method for instant messaging on a recipient's digital communication system, including:

receiving on the recipient's digital communication system one or more instant messages (IM) containing content <u>sent</u> from at least one sender <u>to said recipient</u>, each at least one sender associated with a specific animated character;

<u>the or each instant message not including said specific animated character associated with the respective sender when sent by the sender and when received by the recipient;</u>

forming a queue by creating a dynamic array and inserting one or more of said instant messages into said queue;

determining an identification of said at least one sender of one of said IMs from said IM;

<u>determining if an animated character associated with said sender is stored on the recipient's digital communication system and if not,</u>

sending a request to a character server with said identification of said sender;

receiving from said character server, in response to said request, an animated character associated with said sender;

controlling the timing of operations of actions in the queue and when required displaying at least one animated character associated with a respective sender; and

delivering said content on the recipient's computer system by means of said at least one animated character <u>displayed at a location on a display of the recipient's computer system, the location selected by the recipient or the recipient's computer system;</u>

wherein said IMs are received at said recipient's computer system without being relayed by said character server<u>, and</u>

<u>wherein, when multiple instant messages are received, the contents of said instant messages are delivered sequentially to the recipient and not overlapping in time.</u>

Claims 16-18 (Cancelled)

Claim 19 (Currently amended) A method for managing an Instant Messaging system, including:

<u>associating an animated character located on a character server with a sender;</u>

receiving a request in a<u>said</u> character server from a computer system of a recipient of an Instant Message (IM)<u> sent to the recipient by the sender,</u> for an animated character, said request including an identification of a<u>the</u> sender of the

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IM to said recipient's computer system, said character server having records of animated characters and senders, each sender associated with a specific animated character;

querying a database in said character server with said identification to identify the animated character associated with the sender;

receiving said animated character associated with the sender from said database,

and forwarding said animated character from said character server to said recipient's computer system;

wherein said IM is received at said recipient's computer system without being relayed by said character server, and

wherein said instant message when sent by the sender and when received by the recipient did not include said animated character associated with said sender.

Claims 20-30 (Cancelled)

Claim 31 (Currently amended) An apparatus for instant messaging on a computer system, including:

an IM receiver for receiving at least one Instant Message (IM) from at least one sender, said at least one IM addressed to the recipient by the sender;

a sender identification determiner coupled to said IM receiver, for determining the identity of the sender of a received IM;

a checker for determining if an animated character associated with said sender is stored on the recipient's digital communication system and if not,

a server request sender responsive to said sender identification determiner for forwarding the identity of a sender of an IM to a character server, said character server having records of animated characters and senders, each sender associated with a specific animated character;

an animated character receiver for receiving an animated character associated with the respective sender from said character server, and

an animated character displayer coupled to said IM receiver and said animated character receiver;

and an animated character content deliverer coupled to said animated character displayer,

wherein said IM is received at said IM receiver without being relayed by said character server, and

wherein said instant message when sent by the sender and when received by the

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recipient did not include said animated character associated with said sender.

Claims 32-38 (Cancelled)

Claim 39 (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 31, further including:

an advertisement details periodic retriever; and

an animated character downloader coupled to said advertisement details periodic retriever and to said animated character content deliverer

Claim 40 (Original) The apparatus of claim 31, further including:

a server alert sender;

an artificial intelligence response receiver coupled to said animated character displayer and to said animated character content deliverer.

Claim 41 (Original) The apparatus of claim 40, wherein said server alert sender includes:

a web search message sender; and

a keyword sender coupled to said web search message sender.

Claim 42 (Cancelled)

Claim 43 (Currently amended) An apparatus for managing an Instant Messaging system, including:

an animated character request receiver, for receiving from a computer system of a recipient of an Instant Message (IM) a request for an animated character, said request including data that identifies the sender of the IM message;

a database query generator coupled to said animated character request receiver for generating a query;

an animated character database information receiver for querying a database having records of animated characters and senders, each sender associated with a specific animated character and obtaining from said database the animated character associated with the sender; and

an animated character database information forwarder coupled to said animated character database information receiver for forwarding said animated character to said recipient's computer system;

wherein said IM is received at said recipient's computer system without being relayed by said animated character request receiver, and

wherein said instant message when sent by the sender and when received by the recipient did not include said animated character associated with said sender, and

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wherein the association of said sender with said animated character was created before said instant message when sent by the sender.

Claims 44-49 (Cancelled)

Claim 50 (Currently amended) An apparatus for instant messaging on a computer system, including:

in a recipient's computer system, means for receiving an instant message (IM) containing content from a sender addressed to the recipient by the sender;

in the recipient's computer system, means for determining an identification of said sender of said IM from said IM;

in the recipient's computer system, means for determining if an animated character associated with said sender is stored on the recipient's digital communication system and if not,

in the recipient's computer system, means for sending a request from the recipient's computer system for an animated character associated with said sender to a character server with said identification of said sender, said character server having records of animated characters and senders, each sender associated with a specific animated character;

in the recipient's computer system, means for receiving, in response to said request, from said character server said animated character associated only with said sender;

in the recipient's computer system, means for displaying said animated character associated with said sender; and

means for delivering said content on the recipient's computer system through said animated character,

wherein said IM is received at said recipient's computer system without being relayed by said character server, and

wherein said instant message when sent by the sender and when received by the recipient did not include said animated character associated with said sender.

Claims 51-61 (Cancelled)

Claim 62 (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 50, further including:

means for allowing the sender to select from one or more predefined animated characters to be displayed on the recipient's computer system when said sender sends an IM message to said recipient's computer system.

Claim 63 (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 50, further including:

means for allowing the sender to upload an image to be used in creating an animated character to be displayed on the recipient's computer system when said

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sender sends an IM message to said recipient's computer system.

Claim 64 (Currently amended) An apparatus for managing an Instant Messaging (IM) system, including:

association means for creating in a database, for at least one user, an association between said at least one user and one of a plurality of animated characters, said association means not requiring an instant message to create said association,

whereby instant messages sent by a respective user after creation of said association are associated with the animated character associated with the respective user;

means for receiving from a computer system of a recipient of an Instant Message (IM) a request for an animated character associated with the sender, said request including an identification of a sender of the IM ;

means for querying a database with said identification to identify an said animated character associated only with the sender, said database having records of animated characters and senders, each sender associated with a specific animated character;

means for receiving said animated character associated with the sender from said database; and

means for forwarding said animated character to said recipient's computer system.

Claim 65-78 (Cancelled)

Claim 79 (Currently amended) A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for instant messaging on a computer system, the method including:

receiving on the machine an instant message (IM) containing content from a sender, wherein said IM was addressed to a recipient by the sender;

determining an identification of said sender of said IM from said IM;

determining if an animated character associated with said sender is stored on the recipient's digital communication system and if not,

sending a request from the machine to a character server with said identification of said sender, said character server having records of animated characters and senders, each sender associated with a specific animated character;

receiving on the machine from said character server an animated character

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associated with said sender

displaying <u>at a location</u> on the machine an animated character associated with said sender<u>, the location selected by the recipient or the program</u>; and

delivering said content on the machine through said animated character;

wherein said IM is received at said machine without being relayed by said character server<u>, and</u>

<u>wherein said instant message when sent by the sender and when received by the recipient did not include said animated character associated with said sender.</u>

Claim 80 (Currently amended) A program storage device readable by a machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for managing an Instant Messaging system, the method including:

<u>association means for creating in a database, for at least one user, an association between said at least one user and one of a plurality of animated characters, said association means operating not requiring an instant message to create said association,</u>

<u>whereby instant messages sent by a respective user after creation of said association are associated with the animated character associated with the respective user;</u>

receiving a request from a computer system of a recipient of an Instant Message (IM) for an animated character <u>associated with a sender</u>, said request including an identification of a<u>the</u> sender of the IM to said recipient's computer system;

querying a database with said identification to identify an animated character associated with the sender, said database having records of animated characters and senders, each sender associated with a specific animated character;

receiving said animated character associated with the sender from said database, and

forwarding said animated character to said recipient's computer system.

Claim 81 (Previously presented) The method of claim 1 wherein delivering said content to the recipient's computer system includes:

converting text from said IM into audio through text-to-speech synthesis; and playing said audio.

Claim 82 (Previously presented) The method of claim 81, wherein delivering said content to the recipient's computer system further includes:

animating said character in synchronization with said playing of said audio.

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Claim 83 (Previously presented) The method of claim 82, wherein delivering said content to the recipient's computer system further includes:

detecting an emoticon in said IM; and

animating said character in a way that reflects an emotion of said emoticon.

Claim 84 (Previously presented) The method of claim 1, wherein displaying said animated character includes displaying said animated character outside of an IM window on a screen.

Claim 85 (Previously presented) The method of claim 84, further including enabling said recipient to move said animated character anywhere on the screen.

Claim 86 (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 50, wherein said means for delivering includes:

means for converting text from said IM into audio through text-to-speech synthesis; and

means for playing said audio.

Claim 87 (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 86, wherein said means for delivering further includes:

means for animating said character in synchronization with said playing of said audio.

Claim 88 (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 86, wherein said means for delivering further includes:

means for detecting an emoticon in said IM; and

means for animating said character in a way that reflects an emotion of said emoticon.

Claim 89 (Previously presented) The apparatus of 50, wherein said means for displaying includes means for displaying said animated character outside of an IM window on a screen.

Claim 90 (Previously presented) The apparatus of claim 89, further including means for enabling said recipient to move said animated character anywhere on the screen.

Claim 91 (New) A method of instant messaging, including the steps of:

associating an animated character located on a character server with a first user;

the first user creating an instant message containing content, said instant message not including said animated character associated with said sender;

said first user sending said instant message to a an address of a recipient known to

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the first user;

on the recipient's computer system, receiving said instant message;

on the recipient's computer system, determining an identification of said first user of said instant message from said instant message;

on the recipient's computer system, determining if an animated character associated with said sender is stored on the recipient's digital communication system and if not,

sending a request from the recipient's computer system to said character server for said animated character, said request including said identification of said first user;

receiving, in response to said request, in the recipient's computer system and from said character server, the animated character;

displaying said animated character on the recipient's computer system; and

delivering said content on the recipient's computer system through said animated character.

Claim 92 (New) A method of instant messaging, including the steps of:

receiving instructions to associate an animated character located on a character server with a first user;

after receiving said instructions, receiving from the first user at least one instant message containing content together with identifiers of at least one recipient, said instant message not including said animated character associated with said sender;

forwarding said at least one instant message to said at least one recipient's computer system without said animated character;

receiving from at least one recipient's computer system a request for said animated character, the or each said request including identification of said first user;

forwarding the animated character, in response to the respective request, to the respective recipient's computer system to enable the recipient's computer system to display said animated character and deliver said content through said animated character.

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